**Jesus Plus Nothing Equals Everything**

Based on [Galatians 1:1-12](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Ga1.1-12)

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Pentecost 2

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If God created all things, where did evil come from? If God is the only one who can create from nothing, who created evil? Where did the devil come from? Did God create the devil, why would he do such a thing?

Friends, I hope you have an answer for these things. Parents, your children know to ask these things at a very young age. And if you don’t have answers, they will begin to doubt the faith that you’ve foisted upon them.

So what is the answer? God didn’t create evil. He created everything good, including the devil...and what he created rebelled against him. Evil is not a creation but a destruction; it is not a perfection but a distortion of what once was perfect. **Imagine a perfect polished crisp apple represents what is good; a rotten, shriveled, tainted, distorted apple would represent evil. Now if an apple gets a bruise you can take out your knife and cut off that bad part and the rest remains a good eatable apple, maimed, but good.** But there is a point where an apple becomes so rotten, it ceases to be an apple anymore.

Rotten apples aren’t evil of course. But evil is *like* a rotten apple, because the tree produces the apple, not the rot. The rot began after the apple was severed from the tree. So too, God created all things good, then they were severed from His tree by the devil and their own rebellion. We vandalized God’s good creation; trashed his immaculate house. There is nothing that is evil that wasn’t once good. Evil does not exist on its own. It is a parasite, is a a draining into distortion of that which God created good.

With that in mind, take a look at what St. Paul says about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The perfect Gospel, Paul says, had been distorted by man’s gospel. **The Good News that you are justified by faith alone, was being blighted by the old Jewish law.** You see, Paul set up churches in a place called Galatia, preached to them the pure, true, crisp Gospel--that is, the Good News of the salvation and deliverance we have in Jesus Christ *alone*, according to the will of God the Father. Then he preached that Gospel, and then he left to do the same thing in other churches.

After a while, Paul got word that "new teachers" had come to the churches in Galatia teaching a different message. These new teachers, they didn’t try to convert the church to Islam, or tell them that God is dead and Christianity is a sham. No. They didn't deny the gospel, because then no one would believe them. Instead they distorted it.

What these false teachers, called Judaizers did was come into the church saying, “**You know, the gospel that Paul’s teaching you is good, but we need to touch it up a bit**.” These men were Jews, and they thought that, if Christianity were true, it would need to look more like Judaism. And so in order to be saved by Jesus, these “Judaizers” said you still need to observe the old Jewish customs, especially, the old covenant of circumcision. Now the true gospel is that Christ had fulfilled the old covenant in his flesh, completed it his crucifixion, and then applied the fruits of all he accomplished to believers in Baptism. Paul says later in this same letter, "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." The old covenant had passed away, the new has come. And so now, preaching faith in the old covenant of circumcision distorts the Gospel that Christ has done all and that salvation is in him alone.

And what does Paul say??? “**Hey guys, can’t we all just get along? We’re all Christian after all. Just because we don’t have the *exact same* beliefs about circumcision and baptism, that doesn’t mean we can’t worship together, commune together and have an interfaith prayer service. Sure we have different doctrines, but we all agree in the basics that Jesus is Lord and that’s what *really* matters. Tell you what...You can be Jewish Christians, we’ll be evangelical Christians, the church down the road can be Roman christians—and it’s all good, so long as we all confess that Jesus is Lord.”**

No! Paul says that what these “Judaizers” are preaching in Galatia isn’t the true gospel with just a little different packaging. It is a "different gospel"—that is, a *distorted* Gospel. A rotten apple. If the true Gospel was a “red delicious” apple, these Judaizers had bruised it. These Judaizers, they were bible-believing “Christians” as we would call them today, and yet they had corrupted the Galatians Churches into a different doctrine and practice. You see, Paul had made them Lutherans, and some other teachers came in and had had changed them to a different confession. They became another Christian “denomination”, as it were, and Paul did not tolerate it. In fact, he rebuked them for it.

These Judaizers “believed in Jesus”, and even for Christians who “believed in Jesus”, Paul had these harsh words to say to these churches. He writes, “**I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different Gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the Gospel of Christ**.”

The Gospel is the Good News of the salvation we have in Jesus Christ *alone*. Paul preaches here against anyone, even self-identified “Christians” who would say that we have salvation in Jesus Christ *plus* something else. Some would say, Jesus plus speaking in tongues; or Jesus plus the pope; or Jesus plus “God experiences and moments”, or Jesus plus good works, or Jesus plus...fill-in-the blank.

But someone might say, “**Ah, but you Lutherans say Jesus plus baptism; or Jesus plus Holy Communion saves**.” Nice try, but no. Baptists would say “Jesus plus baptism saves” because Baptism is seen as a necessary outward ritual, a human work that doesn’t do anything except express your “decision to have faith.” Lutherans don't teach that. Lutherans don't say Jesus plus Baptism…we say *Jesus IS baptism*. *Jesus IS Holy Communion* why? Because Jesus says so. He says of the bread, “**This IS my body given for you.”** He says of the cup**, “This IS my blood poured out for you for the forgiveness of your sins**.” The scripture says, the Baptized literally bear and wear Christ. The means of grace are not added to Jesus. They are not something that we do simply because Jesus commanded it. **They are the way Jesus Himself comes to us.**

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is vogue today to tolerate different denominations in Christendom. But different denominations means different doctrines, and Paul says here that he is shocked and dismayed when anyone would tolerate a different gospel.

All denominations disagree, they can’t all be right. So how do you know which teaching is right? Well, imagine I hand out a sheet of paper to all of you, and tell you to write down the Epistle lesson for today. **And you look in your bulleting, copy it down and hand it in. And as I’m going through them, I notice NO TWO PEOPLE wrote exactly the same thing.**  How do I know which, (If any) is the right one, the accurate representation of the original? Well, I would have to check the copies against the original, wouldn’t I? Friends, it’s the same with the multitude of denominations out there, even Lutheranism, especially Lutheranism. The reason there are different denominations is because there are different doctrines. How do you know which is right? Check what a church teaches against the bible. And if they teach a different doctrine than what the God-breathed scriptures teach, don't just pretend nothing's wrong. Consider them anathema, that is, on the road to perdition.

You know, that’s the very advice Paul gives to the Galatians church. They had false teachers in their midst, and how were they supposed to know this? **They were to check their work with the original. In Paul’s time, that meant check what these yahoos are teaching with what the apostles are teaching**. Paul makes a special effort to point out that he is an apostle, which means “**one sent by Jesus himself**.” He established that Jesus appeared to him specially, and even if you doubt that, he points out later that the other apostles who were with Jesus since his baptism--apostles like Peter and John--approve of his teaching (Galatians 2:9). And then he says these amazing words, “But even if we (apostles) or ***an angel from heaven*** were to come back here and preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you before, kick him out!”

Paul gives the church, even us today, two standards with which to judge the true, “red delicious” apple of the Gospel from some new fangled teaching that wafts its way to your ear. And it’s not by “searching your feelings” or trusting your heart; it’s by trusting the Word of God and distrusting the hearts of men.

(1) **The first standard is to compare any new teaching to the teaching of the apostles...those sent by Christ himself.** In Paul’s time, there were apostles sent by Jesus; today we have the Scriptures written and authorized by those same apostles. So we can check our work! If we don’t know the scriptures, we are reeds in the wind, if we know the scriptures we know God himself.

(2) The second standard is this; we are to distrust any teaching that is specifically designed to please men. The Judaizers were trying to add man-pleasing teachings to Jesus. You might not think that teaching circumcision would draw the crowds, but it was the pride of the Jews. **They thought that if they added Jewish customs like circumcision to the Gospel, they would be able to meet the approval of the Jews whom they esteemed and admired.** Peter even fell for it, let his cultural comfort zone lead him to pander to the circumcision party.

They weren't spreading the gospel; they used the gospel to spread Judaism. And here's where all man centered, man pleasing teachings lead to: using the gospel as a means to your own agenda. And it happens today. Notice how churches are more and more embracing homosexuality and transgenderism. You ask them why and what do you think they say, "we are doing it for the sake of spreading the Gospel." What are they really doing, using the Gospel to spread transgederism. They did the same thing with the feminist movement in the 60's; feminism didn't serve the gospel, the gospel served feminism. Do not be deceived.

Have you heard the church slogan, “**Making disciples for Christ by any *means* necessary?**” I have. It’s quite common actually and it scares me to death. What would you think of a politician that said he was going to make sure we fight crime by any means necessary? Are we going to send people to the electric chair for littering? What about a Prime Minister who will win the war against terror by any means necessary? Really? Even by sending a Nuclear Missile to wipe out the Middle East? You would wipe out a lot of terrorism in that way, but those are illegal, unsanctioned means.

We are to make disciples, but not by any means necessary. Paul would say we only make disciples by the *means* of grace—that is, those things through which *Jesus promised to give himself to us*. And Jesus told his church how they are to make disciples. He said, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them; and teaching them all things that I have told you. And he promises “**lo I will be with you always, even to the end of the age**.”

There is the gospel: “Baptize and teach and I will be with you in these things.” What a great Gospel! Jesus and only Jesus, only his sacrifice, only his word, only his means to bring us to the Father. He freely forgives our sins; he looks not upon them, but at our faith that trusts in his salvation. Faith like the Centurion had in Jesus, to heal his servant. Faith that in the Father’s eyes makes you look like His own son. What a wonderful thing to know that Jesus Christ, who saved us--not by whatever means he chose and wanted--but by the exclusive means chosen by his Father of death on a cross and a resurrection...and that we are given these things by the *means of grace* through faith. There is no more sure or certain hope out there than to know where Jesus is for you.

Jesus plus nothing equals everything.